



Location and Context

Within the part of Tayside to the north of the Highland Boundary Fault, glens formed by the combination of glacial and river erosion provide one of the principal structural elements in the landscape. They also provide the focus for most human activity. This Landscape Character Assessment makes a distinction between the upper, mid and lower sections of the glens. It should be noted that those glens containing large lochs are described as a separate landscape type.

The *Mid Upland Glens* Landscape Character Type comprises the middle sections of the most significant glens north of the Highland Boundary Fault in Perth and Kinross and Angus. These sections of glen are distinguished by the concentration of agricultural activity on the narrow valley floor and the predominance of rough grazing, bracken and heather moorland on the valley slopes. Within the Mounth Highlands, this landscape type occurs in Glen Esk, the valley of the West Water, Glen Clova, Glen Prosen, Glen Isla, Glen Shee and Strathardle. Within the West Highland Mountains it occurs at Glen Errochty, Dun Alastair (between Lochs Rannoch and Tummel), Strathbraan, Glen Lyon and Glen Artney.

Key Characteristics

- Middle sections of the principal glens, where there is a notable increase in the width of the glen floor, however the steep concave valley sides still dominate and define the glen.
- Predominantly uninhabited glens of medium to small scale, with sparse scatter of isolated farms, lodges and cottages.
- Important lines of communication into and through the highlands, with access by tracks or dead-end minor roads. Other infrastructure including prominent pylon lines also take advantage of the accessibility in the confining glens.
- Predominantly unenclosed rough grazing, bracken, heather moorland on valley slopes with a concentration of agricultural activity on narrow but distinct valley floor of enclosed improved pasture and pockets of arable, contrasting in colour and texture

with the contained steep glen sides.

- Typically the rivers meander through the flatter gradients of the glen floors, the intricacy of the meander loops dictated by the narrowness of the valley sides.
- Viewed from above, the river alignment draws the eye along and down the valley.
- Rapids, gorges and waterfalls where bands of harder rocks occur.
- Glacial and post glacial features including morainic deposition emphasising the natural and intricate small scale character of many of the glen features.
- Wind clipped native birch and oak woodland in small copses on steeper poorer ground and along river sides. Larger blocks of conifer forest on both valley sides and floor.
- Scatter of small scale farmsteads and small villages located on dry site break of slopes to avoid flooding and maximise shelter and solar gain.
- Proliferation of forts and castles constructed in local stone, add local points of interest and reinforce distinctiveness of glens.
- Several major mansion-houses associated with extensive designed landscapes.
- Views channelled along the valley corridor.
- Relatively remote due to lack of settlement and winding minor roads.

Landscape Character Description

Landform

While the *Mid Upland Glens* Landscape Character Type passes through Dalradian and Moinian grits and schists, encountering a variety of different rock types including granites, limestones, quartzite and intrusive diorite. Where bands of harder rock cross the glen the valley often narrows to a gorge and the river tumbles over a series of waterfalls. One of the best examples of this is found at Linn in Glen Isla, a narrow gorge 36.5 metres deep. In just a short distance, the river descends some 25 metres. A similar gorge is found above Fortingall as the River Lyon descends to join the Tay. However, as with the upper glens, it is glaciation that has had the most profound effect on this landscape type. Classic glaciated valley profiles, hanging valleys, corries and misfit rivers are all evident in these sections of glens. Equally significant, particularly at the local scale, are the glacial deposits found along the valley sides and across the valley floor. Formed as the retreating glaciers dropped their load of scoured rock and soil and modified by temporary meltwater channels, these deposits often create a hummocky landscape of drumlins and eskers. Misfit rivers meandering across the floodplains cut through the deposits creating incised meanders.

While the surrounding mountains still have an influence on the mid sections of the glens, they are more open than their upper sections. There is now a well-defined valley floor ranging between 0.5 and 1 kilometre in width. In places, the river has cut a steep-sided inner valley, often cutting down into the glacial deposits (sometimes in response to the general uplift of the Highlands following the melting of glaciers and ice sheets). Valley floors are typically between 100 and 200 metres and the enclosing valley slopes rise more gently to between 300 and 600 metres. As before, these summits are generally rounded in the east and craggier and more clearly defined in the west. Within the West Highlands the northern valley slopes (effectively dipslopes) tend to be gentler than those to the south (eroded escarpments).

Landcover

Many of the Mid Glens are ecologically important, containing stands of native oak and birch woodland on steeper valley slopes and on poorer land on the valley floor. Much of this is semi-natural and long-established, and active management to exclude grazing is required to encourage regeneration. In places (e.g. near Gallin in Glen Lyon) sparse remnants of Caledonian pine woodland survive. More extensive are the native birchwoods that are found within Glens Prosen and Esk. Much of this is now over-mature and is not regenerating due to high levels of grazing. In addition policy woodland is found in Glen Clova. Within the deeper gorges the cool, damp and shady conditions favour mosses, liverworts and some rare higher plants and invertebrate species. The upper valley slopes generally comprise a mosaic of heather moorland and grassland which, together with rock outcrops and scree slopes, creates a textured and varied landcover.

The semi-natural birch and oak woodland makes a significant contribution to the landscape character, concentrated particularly on steeper valley slopes and on less productive areas of drumlins. A substantial amount of commercial woodland is also found within the *Mid Upland Glens*. Commercial forestry tends to be large in scale, occupying areas of the valley sides. In many cases conifer species have been mixed, integrated with surrounding broadleaf woodland and designed to fit with the natural flow of the landscape. A good example is found along the southern slopes of Glen Errochty where larch, Sitka and other species are mixed, creating a more natural, mottled appearance, and where broadleaves along field boundaries and burns push up into the plantations. In Glen Errochty there is a concentration of woodland on the southern slopes and the retention of pastures and open moorland on the northern slopes. Older plantations are generally less well-integrated into the landscape, often comprising geometric blocks apparently unrelated to landform. Within some of the larger valleys, such as Glen Lyon, the presence of estates is signalled by policy woodlands and by the regular lines of trees along field boundaries.

Most agricultural activity in the *Mid Upland Glens* is concentrated on the valley floor. In a few places the level ground created by valley terraces or morainic deposits also provides suitable land. For the most part, the valley sides are dominated by rough grazing, grading into craggy heather or grass moorland. Pastures dominate, with a variety of livestock grazed on the floor of the glen. In a few places, typically on higher, better drained and sunnier land along the northern side of the glen, root crops or other vegetables are grown. Where this occurs the bright green leaves of the crops, or the brown of the tilled soil, contrasts with the more subdued browns and greens in other parts of the glen. In other places the quality of pasture in the glens has been improved by the provision of drainage, reseeding and the application of fertilisers. Again, this creates an intensity of green which stands out in this semi-upland landscape.

Settlement

The mid sections of the glens are more settled than the upland sections, although still comparatively sparsely settled. Stone farmsteads, often whitewashed with slate roofs, are sited in the lee of spurs or small hillocks, or are associated with small farm woodlands. Solitary cottages are found throughout the *Mid Upland Glens*. Fields are generally enclosed within networks of stone dykes, supplemented by post and wire fencing. Abandoned enclosures on the valley slopes are surrounded by crumbling walls and have been invaded

by bracken and rough grassland. Improved pasture, ley grassland even arable crops are found on flatter fields and along the floor of the glen. Older settlement and farmland is often concentrated on the northern side of the valley, benefiting from a southern aspect and gentler slopes. Traditional building materials are schists and granite with slate. More recent building is located with good access to roads. Shelter and screening is often provided by conifers planted around the boundary of the property. In an otherwise open landscape screening itself draws attention to the building.

Periods of clan warfare are once again reflected in a proliferation of castles and forts. Near Cashlie there are the remains of the ancient forts of Glen Lyon, while further down the glen, Meggernie Castle stands as an important hunting lodge. Glen Isla preserves significant evidence of early settlement and agriculture in hut circles or field systems. Medieval castle sites with later mansion-houses, such as Meggernie, Cortachy and Airlie, are set in important designed landscapes surrounded by estate buildings in distinctive, often baronial, style. Modern development is scarce, limited to a handful of hydroelectric schemes and their associated pylons. For the most part, the middle parts of the highland glens are served by minor roads. These generally sit easily in the landscape, following natural contours along the floor of the glen, winding their way between drumlins and marking the boundary between the rough valley sides and grazed floor of the glen. Recreation is of a fairly low-key, informal nature.

Perception

These sections of the West Highlands and Mounth glens provide a transition between the upper and lower parts of the valleys. The presence of the mountains is still the dominant influence on landscape character and it is only on the narrow valley floor that agriculture has been able to bring the land into productive use. Despite the size of the mountains, the narrowness of the glens means that these are relatively small-scale landscapes. Settlement has generally taken the form of a scatter of buildings constructed from local materials. More substantial development, such as pylons, is very evident. These valleys provide opportunities for fairly low-key, informal recreation.

This is one of 390 Landscape Character Types identified at a scale of 1:50 000 as part of a national programme of Landscape Character Assessment republished in 2019.

The area covered by this Landscape Character Type was originally included in the Tayside LCA (Land Use Consultants), published 1999.